

GENDER DYNAMICS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN BURUNDI

Gender and Programmatic Context



Fifteen years after the Burundian government instituted a requirement that women hold a minimum of 30% of seats in Parliament as a response to women's historical underrepresentation in public life, the country has made progress on adopting laws that protect women and girls from sexual violence and exploitation and ensuring equal access to basic education. Even as Burundian women are being encouraged to take bigger roles in political decision-making, there remain discriminatory laws and harmful traditional practices that continue to perpetuate unequal gender power dynamics such as inheritance laws that prevent women from owning land and a labor law that suggests women on maternity leave only receive half of their salary.

Building Bridges in Burundi

Building Bridges in Burundi is a country-wide, five-year peacebuilding project, developed to mitigate the root causes of conflict and instability in Burundi. The programme aims at transforming the lives of young men and women, by equipping them with the means to become responsible and resilient citizens and work towards peaceful coexistence.

The BBB program encouraged women to take a bigger role in political decision-making through the local committees for good governance (CLGP) but the recent study found that accessing that political space remain a huge challenge for women. Patriarchal norms still block women from fully participating in political spaces.

"I joined the program from the start of its activities but didn't know how I could be of use. Especially when it came to speaking in front of a crowd I thought no one was going to listen to me. I overcame my fear and shared with others the concepts of leadership, Ubuntu, entrepreneurship and conflict management."

(Female, Rutana)

"The community is peaceful, the young people are gentle and calm. The various conflicts that arise are resolved by the CLAs in collaboration with Local Committee for Good Governance."

(Female, Kirundo)

Gender Study Findings on Good Governance

In 2021, an analysis was conducted to examine how BBB initiatives made an impact on gender relations at community level. The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews and focus-groups across 13 municipalities in Burundi. Here we share our main findings and recommendations.



American Friends Service Committee



Main findings and observations:

The unequal access to income and stigmatization of female politicians discourage women from further pursuing their political aspirations.

Husbands of female politicians are still very influential in how they select which political party to represent.

While men are more likely to hold administrative authorities to account because the door is wider for them to express their grievances, authorities will more likely consider women's grievances against elected officials when they are presented through women's associations and other non-governmental structures.

At accountability meetings organized by elected officials, women's opinions are often ignored thus they are unable to influence the governance of their communities.

Women still hold the majority of traditional household responsibilities which take up most of women's time and commitment.

The Burundian practice of giving men the last word discourages many women to take on bigger roles such as running for elected office or seeking political leadership roles.

Even when women happen to find a seat at the table, since local governance structures (CCDC, CDC and other local associations) are dominated by influential members of the ruling political party, they are often unable to promote the interests and needs of women and girls but rather those of their parties.

Women are more at ease and more engaged when they represent women's associations in political spaces.

Recommendations:

Women-led associations that seek accountability from elected officials should be further strengthened and supported as a safe space for women's political participation.

There is a need to develop and strengthen women-led networks that focus on good governance and accountability; this kind of allyship would strengthen solidarity and trust among women.

There is a need to eradicate the stigma of "qualified female politician" and promote the narrative that increasing women's political participation is a boost for both men and women and entire communities' development.



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